

# East Face Vegetation Management Project Report on Wilderness, Inventoried Roadless Areas, and Other Undeveloped Lands

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## Introduction

During public involvement for the East Face Vegetation Management Project, a commenter identified an “Uninventoried roadless area of ecological significance” within that project area of almost 5,000 acres in size.

From the mid-1970s through 2001 the Forest Service maintained a roadless area inventory of undeveloped lands that we used and updated for RARE, RARE II, and in support of Land and Resource Management Planning completed in 1990. During that time, these lands were called “roadless areas” or “inventoried roadless areas” (IRA). With completion of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) in 2001, these lands ceased being an “inventory”, and IRAs became a designation with fixed boundaries and prohibitions set by that rule and Forest Service regulation (36 CFR 294).

The 2006 handbook for wilderness evaluation (FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70) is reflected in the 2008 Forest Service NEPA regulations (36 CFR 220). In the regulations, potential effects to “inventoried roadless areas” and “potential wilderness areas” are factors in determining what the appropriate NEPA document would be for a project.

The 2012 planning rule for land management planning for the National Forest System was published in the Federal Register on April 9, 2012, and it became effective 30 days following the publication date on May 9, 2012. The Forest Service released proposed planning directives for public review and comment on February, 2013. Over 16,000 comments representing diverse communities and interests from across the country shaped the final planning directives. The final planning directives were released and became effective January 30, 2015. The planning rule is very clear that application of the criteria for inventory of areas that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation system (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70) is at the land management planning (Forest Plan) level only. The Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision DEIS 2014 (BMFPR) completed an inventory identifying a set of PWAs across the Blue Mountains. The PWAs identified in the BMFPR DEIS will be considered in this analysis.

The term “other undeveloped lands” is presented and used in this document to provide a consideration for the unroaded areas identified during public scoping efforts.

## EXISTING CONDITION

### WILDERNESS AND INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS

The USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region (PNW or Region 6) covers approximately 27.2 million acres within the states of Oregon and Washington. These acres represent approximately 27% of the total acreage of both states combined. These 27.2 million acres are managed based on the land allocations designated within the respective National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans. However, the management of designated Wilderness areas and the management of Inventoried Roadless Areas are overriding and common among all Forests within the Pacific Northwest Region and across the nation. In Region 6, there are approximately 4 million acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas (15% of the total National Forest System Lands) and approximately 5 million acres of Wilderness (18%).

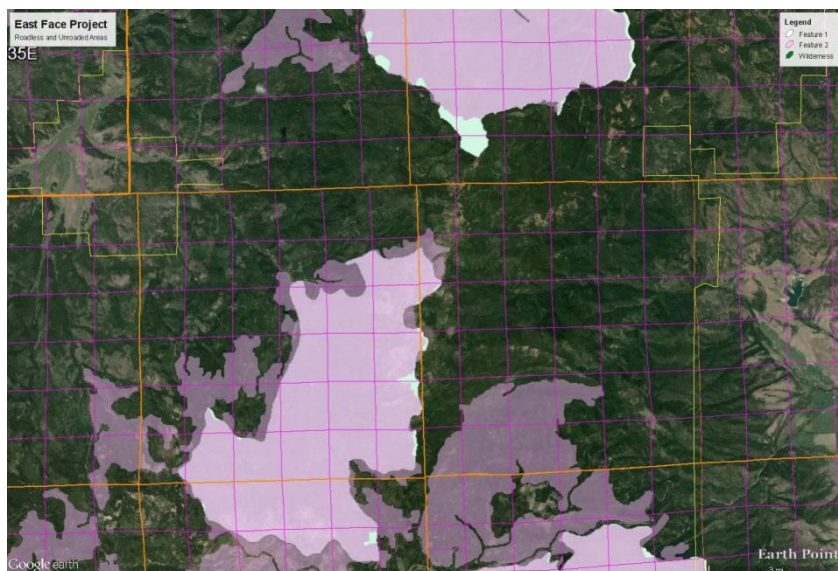
The southernmost tip of the East Face Vegetation Management Project area borders approximately ½ mile of the North Fork John Day Wilderness. It also borders the Twin Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) along the southern boundary on the other side of the Elkhorn Scenic Byway (Forest Road 73), the Upper Grande Ronde IRA on the western side of the project boundary on the other side of Forest road 43, and a portion of the Beaver Creek IRA along the northwest edge of the project area (Figure 1).

## **POTENTIAL WILDERNESS AREAS**

The BMFPR completed an extensive analysis of lands that could be considered potential wilderness areas (PWAs). PWAs were identified in conjunction with the Beaver Creek, Upper Grande Ronde, and Twin Mountain IRAs as well as the North Fork Wilderness Area; however, none of these are located within the East Face project area boundary (Figure 2). All of them are on the other side of the major roads (National Forest roads 73 and 43) bounding the East Face project area.

There are no lands inventoried for wilderness character located on the BLM lands within the project area.

## **OTHER UNDEVELOPED LANDS**



**Figure 1 – Oregon Wild Roadless Area Map.**

Oregon Wild provided the map shown in Figure 1 during scoping and urged that two units from the proposed action (104 and 105) and their associated temporary roads be dropped from treatment consideration because they “appear to be located in the ecologically significant Bear Butte unroaded area that is almost 5,000 acres in size” (they have defined Feature 1 and Feature 2 as roadless areas).

No further description of these areas or information related to the attributes that made them ecologically significant was provided by Oregon Wild. All of this area is located outside of the BMFPR PWAs.

This undeveloped area is allocated in the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Plan to:

- MA16 – Administrative Sites (i.e. Anthony Lakes Recreation Area)
- MA6 – Backcountry
- MA15 – Allocated Old Growth
- MA1 – Timber Production Emphasis

Nearly one half of the area is allocated to MA1 with the remainder primarily allocated to MA6 and two large blocks of allocated old growth. The MA16 encompasses the Floodwater Flats residences and Mud Lake area within the Anthony Lakes WUI.

**Vegetation** - The 1960 Anthony Creek fire and the 1990 Bear fire burned through approximately one quarter to one third of the undeveloped area identified in Figure 2 within the East Face project area. These areas have regenerated as lodgepole thickets with interspersed patches of large pine and larch which survived these earlier fires. Most of the area is predominantly lodgepole pine with some small scattered moist forest patches throughout the area. Within the northwest corner of the undeveloped area between Anthony Creek and road 4380 are some areas of old forest multi-stratum old growth (OFMS). There are no threatened and endangered plant species located within this area; however, there is a population of whitebark pine (candidate species for listing as threatened) located within the southwest corner of this undeveloped area.

**Fisheries and Water** - Anthony Creek, a class I stream runs along the northern edge of this area and south to Mud Lake (within the identified area) and on to Anthony Lake (outside of the area) contributing heavily to the swampy/boggy nature of the southwest end of the identified undeveloped area. Five miles of Anthony Creek, a perennial fishbearing stream, is designated as spawning and rearing habitat and designated critical habitat for bull trout, listed as threatened; however, two irrigation diversions (Carnes and Couganhour) prevent fish passage into the identified undeveloped area. Recent bull trout and brook trout surveys confirm that only brook trout are in the stream reach within this undeveloped area and no bull trout were found.

**Soils** - Soils within this identified area are primarily volcanic ash over decomposed granitics (Landtype associations 131, 132, and 156). They are highly erosive resulting in areas with gully/rill erosion and lost surface vegetation on steep slopes. Refer to the soils analysis for more information on these soil types.

**Threatened & Endangered Wildlife** - There are no threatened or endangered wildlife species within this undeveloped area. Thirteen species listed as sensitive either have potential habitat within the project area or have been documented to occur in the project area. Proposed project activities would either have a beneficial impact on these species or may impact individuals or their habitat but would not cause a trend toward listing of the species.

**Opportunities for Solitude** - The southwest corner of this undeveloped area is immediately adjacent to and encompasses a portion of (in the Mud Lake area) a very developed year round recreation area which receives extensive use by recreationists. Due to the presence of the Anthony Lakes Recreation Area, the Floodwater Flats recreation residence tract, and Mud Lake campground this portion of the undeveloped area does not provide for optimum opportunities for solitude. The same is true of the northeast portion of this area as it is surrounded on 3 sides by not only several major roads (roads 7312 and 4380) but also a network of previously closed roads which still receive motor vehicle use, especially during big game hunting seasons which run from August to November. The area with the greatest opportunity for solitude would be toward the center of the undeveloped area around Anthony Creek. Topography in this area is very steep with deep incised canyons. From the top of some of these ridges views into the valley and of Pilcher Creek Reservoir can be seen. There are no trails into these areas and access can be difficult due to the topography and the dense thickets of lodgepole pine.

**Apparent Naturalness** – As described above, in the southwest corner of this area the imprint of man's work is fairly obvious not only in the foreground but also of the ski area in the background. The central portion of the undeveloped area has higher levels of apparent naturalness with areas of exposed rock formations. While the vegetation is not particularly unique or remarkable it has been primarily affected by the forces of nature such as fire and erosion. The northeastern corner of this area still has obvious old dozer lines put in during fire suppression activities and some very old skid trails/logging roads from harvest units back in the early 1970's or possibly older. This area does not have the same level of apparent naturalness found in the central portion of this area.

## EFFECTS

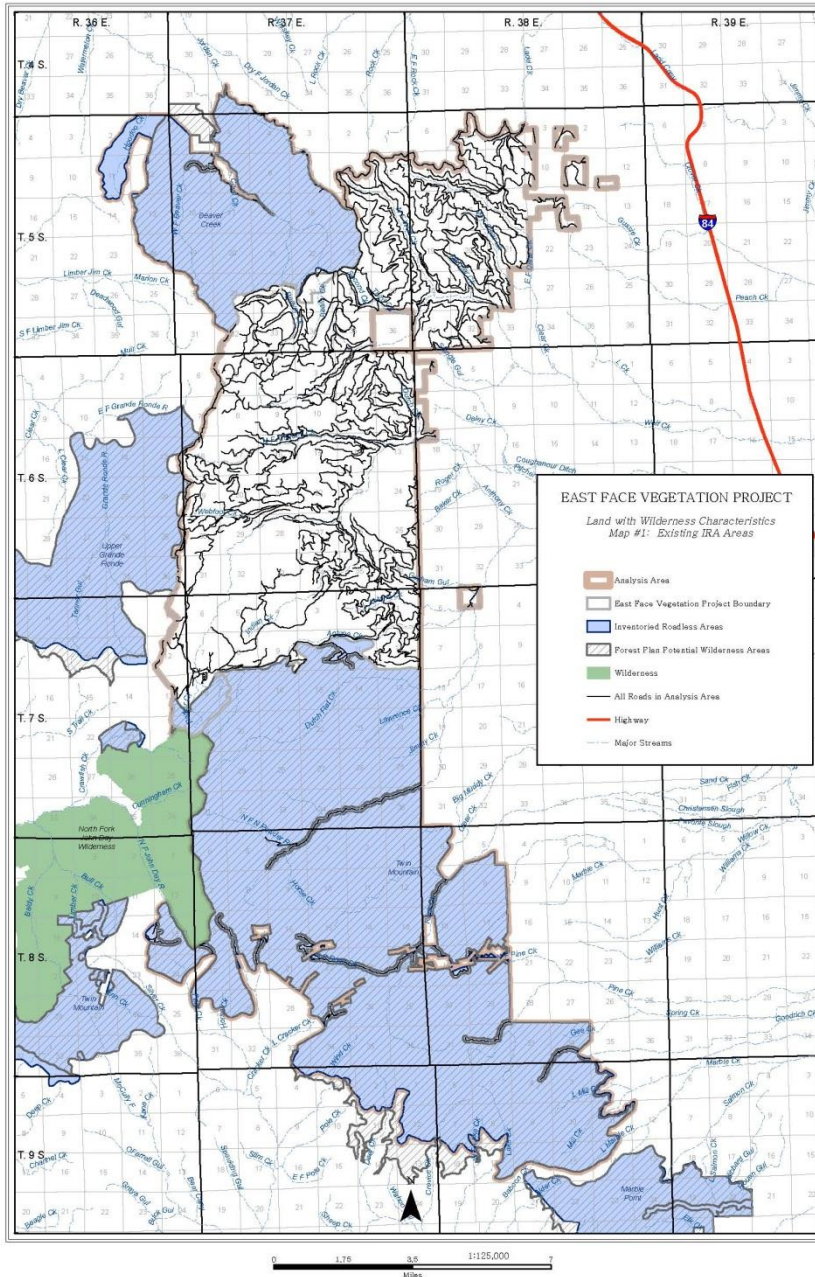
### Scale of Analysis

The scale of this analysis includes all acres (Forest Service and BLM) contained within the East Face Vegetation Management project area (47,636 acres) and adjacent Forest Service and other federal lands, as appropriate, sufficient to consider adjacent roadless, wilderness, and potential wilderness areas (identified in the BMFPR effort). The analysis area is approximately 110,666 acres (Figure 2).

The measures used to compare between alternatives for lands with wilderness characteristics are:

- Intrinsic biophysical values (soils, water, fisheries, plants, wildlife)
- Intrinsic social values (recreation, apparent naturalness, remoteness, scenic quality, cultural resources)
- Other locally identified unique characteristics

**Figure 2 – East Face Wilderness, IRA, Undeveloped Lands Analysis Area**



## No Direct/Indirect or Cumulative Effects

### WILDERNESS AND INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS

No project activities are proposed in the Wilderness or any of the IRAs. The proposed project would have no direct, indirect or cumulative effects on designated Wilderness areas or IRAs; therefore there will be no further discussion on designated wilderness or inventoried roadless areas in this report.

### POTENTIAL WILDERNESS AREAS

As described above, all of the BMFPR PWAs are on the other side of the major roads (National Forest roads 73 and 43) bounding the East Face project area. Therefore, the proposed project will have no direct, indirect or cumulative effects on any BMFPR PWAs and there will be no further discussion on these areas in this report.

# Direct and Indirect Effects

## OTHER UNDEVELOPED LANDS

### *ALTERNATIVE 1*

The entire undeveloped area would remain as described in the existing condition section above under this alternative. There would be no direct or indirect effects on this area other than it would not receive the whitebark pine enhancement work planned within the fuel reduction units in the southwestern corner.

### *ACTION ALTERNATIVES*

Table 1 describes proposed treatment units within the identified undeveloped area. All action alternatives treat units 311-313; a portion of each is located within the undeveloped area.

**Table 1 – Summary of Treatment Units within Undeveloped Area**

Unit	Total Acres	Acres w/in Undeveloped Area	Treatment Type	Notes	Alternatives Treated In
310	351	40	WFH	This area located along the ridgetop near Bear Butte and immediately adjacent to 7300144 road. Area has been harvested in the past. Fuel reduction is all by hand.	2, 4, 5
311	316	245	WFH	This unit is surrounded on 3 sides by the Floodwater Flats road 7300160, Elkhorn Scenic Byway (Forest Rd 73), and the 7300142 road. Area is steep and also has the OTEC powerline in it. Located within the Anthony Lakes WUI. Fuel reduction is all by hand.	2, 3, 4, 5
312	424	200	WFH	Unit is surrounded on 2 sides by the Elkhorn Scenic Byway (Forest Rd 73) with the Floodwater Flats road 7300160 along the eastern edge. Also has the Mud Lake Campground in the southern part of the unit. A couple trails appear to also be within this area. Located within the Anthony Lakes WUI. Fuel reduction is all by hand.	2, 3, 4, 5
313	164	40	WFM	Most of this unit is on the west side of the 43 road treating areas adjacent to the Grande Ronde Lake campground. The 40 acre portion within the identified undeveloped area is adjacent to the 43 road on the east side where the 4300940 road takes off. Fuel reduction within this unit is accomplished using a slashbuster.	2, 3, 4, 5
104	26	0	HTH	This unit is located outside of the identified undeveloped area.	2, 5
105	18	18	HTH	This unit is adjacent to Anthony Creek and within 800-1200 feet of road 7312650.	2, 5

### **Vegetation**

As described under the Forest Health and Sustainability effects, fuel reduction treatments will improve the health, vigor and sustainability of stands by not only thinning lodgepole thickets and reducing their susceptibility to insects and diseases but also create some heterogeneity in a very homogeneous landscape. The OFMS stands within this area are not treated under any of the alternatives. Due to riparian buffers and avoidance mitigation measures incorporated into project design no sensitive plant



species are impacted within this undeveloped area. All of these alternatives provide for enhancement of whitebark pine trees located within the southwest corner of this undeveloped area.

### **Fisheries and Water**

None of the alternatives propose treatments within the riparian area of Anthony Creek. The treatments within the swampy/boggy area of the southwest end of the identified undeveloped area will be only treated by hand which will not negatively impact this area.

### **Soils**

The soils effects analysis shows that units 310-312 will not affect detrimental soil conditions due to the gentle slopes and the use of hand treatments. Unit 313 has the potential to slightly increase detrimental soil conditions but it is 16% below Forest Plan standards. Units 104 and 105 have a moderate erosion hazard potential; however, due to gentle slopes within the units the detrimental soil conditions are estimated to be well below Forest Plan standards under Alternatives 2 and 5. Because 104 is not located within the undeveloped area defined above it would have no effect on the soils within that area.

### **Threatened & Endangered Wildlife**

The treatments proposed in this undeveloped area are not expected to impact sensitive wildlife species due to their location, implementation of riparian buffers, and nature of the treatments under all action alternatives.

### **Opportunities for Solitude**

As described under the existing condition discussion above, the southwest corner of this undeveloped area is influenced by the developed year round recreation opportunities surrounding it, resulting in limited opportunities for solitude within the area. Fuel reduction treatments under all action alternatives within this area are minor in nature and would not change the limited opportunities for solitude already available within this area. The same is true of treatment of unit 105 in Alternatives 2 and 5 in the northeast part of the described undeveloped area. There are limited opportunities for solitude within this area currently and treatment of unit 105 would not change these limited opportunities.

The area with the greatest opportunity for solitude (area within the center of the undeveloped area around Anthony Creek) would not be affected by any activities proposed under any of the action alternatives as no activities are proposed within this area.

### **Apparent Naturalness**

While treatments in the southwest corner of this area would reduce the apparent naturalness within the area for the short term (3-5 years) the impacts are expected to be minor due to scenery mitigations such as screens, low stumps, slash pile location requirements, etc. Because the imprint of man's work is already quite obvious within much of this area, the action alternatives would have a very minor impact within this area. The central portion of the undeveloped area with the highest levels of apparent naturalness would not be affected by any of the action alternatives as no treatment is proposed within this area. Treatment of unit 105 under Alternatives 2 and 5 would also reduce the apparent naturalness within this area by leaving obvious signs of active stand management such as stumps and slash piles; however, this area already has signs of active management in the past. Alternatives 3 and 4 would retain current levels of apparent naturalness within these areas.

## Cumulative Effects

### **OTHER UNDEVELOPED LANDS**

#### ***ALTERNATIVE 1***

Under this alternative no actions would be authorized; therefore, it would not add anything to the effects of past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the definition provided by the CEQ regulations, there would be no cumulative effects for this alternative.

#### ***ACTION ALTERNATIVES***

The OTEC Powerline fuel reduction/clearing work beneath and adjacent to the powerline corridor has the potential to impact apparent naturalness in the southwest portion of the undeveloped area defined in this project area. Powerline clearing, in combination with the adjacent fuel reduction treatment in East Face unit 311, would create some additional impacts to apparent naturalness in this area creating a substantially noticeable human imprint.

## Finding of Consistency

Activities proposed in the East Face project area are consistent with the intent of the land allocation decisions made in the Forest Plan.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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